

Wires 9/11/20

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Oregon Governor Brown Says Dozens Reported Missing Amid Massive Wildfires

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Dozens of individuals have been reported missing amid out-of-control wildfires in the US state of Oregon, Governor Kate Brown told reporters on Friday.

"As of now, there are early reports from our state police that there are dozens of missing persons related to the fires, specifically in Jackson, Lane and Marion counties," Brown said.

The governor added that Oregon's federal emergency declaration has been approved.

More than million acres - over 1,500 sq. miles - of land has burned in the state and more than 40,000 individuals have been evacuated, while some 500,000 remain in the evacuation zones, she said.

Brown also said that cooler temperatures and increased moisture in the coming days are expected to bring relief to first responders battling the blazes.

At least 102 major blazes have ravaged 4.4 million acres across twelve western states of the United States. Earlier on Friday, media reported the wildfires have claimed at least 23 lives in the affected states.

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Canadian, German Foreign Ministers Discuss Situation in Belarus - Statement

TORONTO, September 11 (Sputnik) - Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne and his German counterpart Heiko Maas discussed the situation in Belarus and the alleged poisoning of Russian blogger Alexey Navalny, Canada's top diplomat said in a statement on Friday.

"Today, I spoke with Germany's [Foreign Minister] Heiko Maas. We notably discussed Belarus, Navalny's recovery and the COVID-19 pandemic," Champagne said via Twitter.

Champagne reiterated that Canada and Germany are like-minded global partners committed to multilateralism.

On August 9, the Belarusian opposition organized protests after disputing the results of the presidential election in which incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko was reelected for a sixth term by winning 80 percent of the vote. The opposition insists that its candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, won the election.

Canada and Germany have not recognized the results of the Belarus election and pledged support for Tikhanovskaya.

Lukashenko has repeatedly accused Western nations of directly interfering in the country's affairs. Russia has also voiced concern over the signs of foreign interference in the internal affairs of Belarus.

Navalny fell ill during a domestic Russian flight on August 20. He was initially treated in the Siberian city of Omsk, where the plane made an emergency landing. Two days later, Navalny was flown to the Berlin-based Charite hospital for further treatment once the Russian doctors established that he was fit for a cross-border aerial transportation.

On September 2, German officials claimed Navalny's laboratory samples contained traces of a nerve agent from the Novichok group.

Leonid Rink, a scientist directly involved in the development of Novichok, told Sputnik that Navalny's symptoms were uncharacteristic of poisoning with this toxin.

According to the Russian authorities, Berlin has so far provided Moscow with neither an official notification on the findings, nor assistance in the investigation launched by the Russian authorities immediately upon Navalny's initial emergency hospitalization in Russia.

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FEATURE - Worker Exposed to 9/11 Toxins Continues to Suffer, Neglected by US Government

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik), Barrington M. Salmon - Not a day passes when Gina Gentile's body does not remind her things are not well, or something, be it a thought or a smell conjures up the personal tragedy she lives with. She suffers from a number of health problems after prolonged exposure to toxic dust particles and pollutants while working at Ground Zero. Since becoming ill Gentile said she has not received the assistance from the government or compensation she deserves for contracting illnesses while working in an environment that New York City, state and federal officials said was safe.

And now that America is grappling with COVID-19 and losing, her anxieties and concerns for her health have ratcheted up.

On September 11, 2001, two aircraft loaded with about 40,000 pounds of jet fuel crashed into the World Trade Center's Twin Towers. Two days later, Gentile began working at Ground Zero as part of a team from a New Jersey laboratory which set up a triage section at the site.

"I worked that job for a full two years at 139 Fulton Street picking up specimens and dropping off medical supplies right in the heart of Ground Zero," she told Sputnik.

Gentile is one of an estimated 40,000 people who worked or volunteered at Ground Zero in the poisonous dust and around fires that burned for months. And Gentile is one of those thousands who have fallen ill with heart and liver problems, cancers, kidney disease and the deterioration of their organs and nervous systems.

Because she has chronic laryngitis, Gentile is unable to talk but she agreed to answer a Sputnik reporter's questions by email.

Researchers and medical specialists determined that dust from the fallen Twin Towers had more than 2,500 contaminants, including asbestos, a toxic cancer-causing agent; detectable

amounts of mercury and lead; construction debris; dioxins and other poisons caused by fires that burned unabated; as well as other poisonous, deadly chemical substances and pollutants. Gentile unknowingly inhaled all this for two years and soon came down with an assortment of illnesses.

"It has been a nightmare. I was diagnosed with severe asthma, chronic sinusitis and I also had intestinal digestive issues and kidney disease. Now, I have chronic laryngitis," said Gentile, a wife and mother. "It has affected my family drastically financially and emotionally. And no, I have not been compensated."

It is estimated that about 400,000 people were exposed to toxins who were not first responders. School children, teachers, employees, and nearby residents breathed in toxic fumes and air contaminated with asbestos, crushed microscopic building materials, shards of glass and other contaminants.

Nearly 3,000 people died on September 11 and since then, more than 2,000 have died of illnesses related to 9/11. So far, more than 43,000 people have been officially determined to be suffering from a 9/11-related health problem.

The September 11th Victim Compensation Fund was established in 2011 to offer payouts to compensate for the illnesses and deaths caused by exposure to the toxins at the site. The \$7.3 billion fund had paid out \$5 billion to 21,000 claimants but it was running out of money and still had claims from more than 19,000 people to take care of.

However, Gentile will not get any of that help or assistance from other 9/11-related pools of money because of a loophole that prevents her from taking advantage of the much-needed funds.

"The private workers and students and people that were living there in, around or close to Ground Zero are not considered first responders," she said. "Because they're in this Catch 22, they get denied Workers Comp. The best example is the article on the ASPCA worker who died the day after the Workers Compensation Board denied her benefits although she had cancer." Gentile said she does not believe they treated anyone fairly.

"I think we should be entitled to collect Workers Compensation benefits. In my case, I was in a Catch 22 because I was working for a company that was helping the first responders but I am not a first responder or a city worker therefore I cannot claim disability or compensation because they consider me a private worker," Gentile said.

Gentile, who said she has lost her hearing twice during this ordeal, said she and many others like her feel forgotten, ignored and marginalized.

"They made me an offer but my attorney amended the offer," she said. "Also, they have a program, a WTC 911 program for medical treatment but the best part is that they bill my coverage, which is unbelievable."

She said there is no justice for people who are sick.

"Basically, I think they are just waiting for us to die. My question is, where did all the funding go?" Gentile asked.

Even with the many health problems she has, Gentile said she is still forced to work so she and her husband can continue to pay bills and maintain their household. Her concerns are exacerbated because she is someone with pre-existing underlying health conditions in the middle of a global pandemic that has so far sickened more than 6.3 million people and killed close to 200,000.

"The pandemic, I feel, is deadly to 9/11 WTC victims. We are high risk but I have to work to survive. That is just the way it is," Gentile said.

9/11, she added, was the tip of the iceberg of injustice and inhumane treatment from the government.

"Never in a million years would I think I would be dealing with 9/11 and the coronavirus and having a president like [Donald] Trump and also be dealing with the hate and people being racist and naive and ignorant. We are going backwards," Gentile warned.

The similarities between 9/11 and what is going on now means the government has to be reformed and changed, Gentile said. The government needs to stop being greedy and start caring for humanity.

Gentile also noted where the government, for her, really exists.

"My government is the Good Lord above," Gentile concluded.

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US Senate Intelligence Committee Requests DHS Data After Whistleblower Complaint - Letter

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US Senate Intelligence Committee on Friday sent a letter to the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) requesting that it submits all intelligence assessments related to a whistleblower's complaint that the Trump administration allegedly mishandled data.

Earlier this week, former Acting DHS Under Secretary for Intelligence and Analysis Brian Murphy accused White House officials of manipulating, censoring and politicizing the department's intelligence, including on Russia's alleged interference in US elections, so that it supported the Trump administration's claims.

"As the Committee investigates this matter, we respectfully request that you provide the Committee with all intelligence assessments produced by I&A [Office of Intelligence and Analysis] related to Mr. Murphy's complaint including but not limited to products related to migration and asylum, foreign interference in US elections, and domestic threats related to white supremacy, Antifa and 'anarchist groups,'" Acting Committee Chairman Marco Rubio and Vice Chairman Mark Warner said in the letter.

The senators also asked the DHS to provide by September 18 source notes, a compilation of underlying intelligence and a comprehensive accounting of how the assessments were produced.

Murphy alleged in the complaint - submitted to the DHS Inspector General this week - that White House and DHS officials had asked him on various occasions to manipulate intelligence in support of the Trump administration's various claims such as that terrorists were a threat on the southern US border and that the far-Left Antifa movement and other anarchists were domestic terrorists.

Murphy also claimed that senior Trump administration officials suppressed intelligence reports about alleged Russian interference in the 2016 US election and sought to highlight data on meddling by China and Iran.

US House Intelligence Committee Chairman Adam Schiff sent a letter to Murphy earlier asking him to appear before the panel for a deposition on September 21.

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Trump Awards Medal of Honor to US Army Soldier Who Played Key Role in Freeing 75 Hostages

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump on Friday awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor, the highest award for bravery in the US military, to Army Sgt. Maj. Thomas Patrick Payne for his key role in a Special Forces mission that rescued 75 hostages in Iraq.

"Pat, you personify the motto, 'Rangers lead the way,'" Trump said before personally fastening the medal around Payne's neck during a ceremony at the White House.

On October 22, 2015, during a daring nighttime hostage rescue in Kirkuk Province, Iraq, then-Sargent First Class Payne led a combined assault team charged with clearing one of two buildings known to house hostages.

"Sergeant Payne's extraordinary heroism and selfless actions were key to liberating 75 hostages during a contested rescue mission that resulted in 20 enemy fighters killed in action," the citation for the award said.

First Lady Melania Trump, Vice President Mike Pence, Defense Secretary Mark Esper, Secretary of the Army Ryan McCarthy, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Mark Milley, Chief of Staff of the Army General James McConville and Sergeant Major of the Army Michael Grinston were among those attending.

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Pompeo Says 2 Arab Accords With Israel Open Door for Peace, Prosperity in Middle East

WASHINGTON, September 10 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Friday said he is confident that the two recently inked Arab peace agreements with Israel will pave the way for new accords with other countries in the Middle East.

Pompeo's comments came on the heels of the announcement that Bahrain and Israel have agreed to establish full diplomatic relations, following a similar deal reached last month between the Jewish state and the United Arab Emirates.

"The two peace agreements open new possibilities for peace and prosperity," Pompeo said in a statement released by the State Department. "From my recent travels to the region, there is clear momentum for a new Middle East. I thank King Hamad and Prime Minister Netanyahu for having the courage to change the fate of nations."

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US Budget Deficit in August Stood at \$200Bln Raising 2020 Total to \$3 Trillion - Treasury

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US federal budget deficit stood at \$200 billion in August, with massive spending to contain the effects of the novel coronavirus pandemic bringing the total deficit for the year to an all-time high of \$3 trillion, the Treasury Department's monthly statement revealed on Friday.

Cumulative outlays for August stood at \$423.3 billion, according to the statement that typically breaks down the federal government's commitments without citing factors. Receipts stood at \$223.2 billion, resulting in the \$200 billion deficit.

The total US deficit for 2020 aligns almost perfectly with the roughly \$3 trillion passed by Congress since March under four phases of the Coronavirus Aid, Relief and Economic Security (CARES) Act to provide grants and loans to US businesses and paycheck protection to qualifying citizens and permanent residents.

The US economy shrank nearly 33 percent in the first three months of 2020 for its sharpest decline since the financial crisis of 2008, as most of the 50 states in the country went into lockdown to stem the spread of the novel coronavirus between March and May.

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Israel, Bahrain Agree to Normalize Relations - Joint Statement

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Israel and Bahrain announced in a joint statement that they have agreed to normalize relations and will sign a US-brokered peace deal next week in Washington.

"President Donald J. Trump, His Majesty King Hamad bin Isa bin Salman al-Khalifa of the Kingdom of Bahrain, and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel spoke together and agreed to the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and the Kingdom of Bahrain," according to the statement tweeted by Trump.

Bahrain follows the lead of its neighbor, the United Arab Emirates, which reached the peace deal with Israel last month. Both agreements will be signed at the White House ceremony next Tuesday.

"The Kingdom of Bahrain has also accepted President Trump's invitation to join Israel and the United Arab Emirates at the historic signing ceremony on September 15, 2020, at the White House where Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu of Israel and Foreign Minister Abdullatif Al Zayani of Bahrain will be signing a historic Declaration of Peace," the statement said.

The UAE is also expected to be represented by its Foreign Minister.

The latest peace agreement will see Israel and Bahrain exchange embassies and ambassadors, and allow direct flights between their countries, according to the White House.

Under the accord, Bahrain and Israel will also launch initiatives to boost cooperation "across a broad range of sectors," the White House said.

UAE and Bahrain will be the third and the fourth Arab country to have a full peace deal with Israel after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994.

Trump, who takes credit for brokering both agreements, hailed the announcement as "another historic breakthrough."

"Our two GREAT friends Israel and the Kingdom of Bahrain agree to a Peace Deal – the second Arab country to make peace with Israel in 30 days!" he tweeted.

White House Senior Adviser Jared Kushner, Trump's son-in-law and his pointman for Middle Eastern endeavors, told reporters that the US decided not to procrastinate with the Bahraini deal, encouraged by an overwhelmingly positive domestic and international feedback to the UAE agreement.

"The agreement that we made with the United Arab Emirates and Israel was even more popular than we expected, which is why this next agreement came so quickly," he said during a phone briefing. "We were not sure what the reaction would be, but it has been overwhelmingly positive and more and more countries are rushing to try to figure out how they can... create a paradigm for much more peaceful and prosperous future."

Kushner expressed confidence that all Arab countries will ultimately normalize with Israel and promised to keep working on that.

"There is a new momentum and a new hopefulness in the Middle East. People are flocking to peace," he said.

Kushner praised Trump's record of achievement in the Middle East as "really unparalleled over the last decades."

US President, who runs for re-election this November, has recently been nominated for the Nobel peace prize for reconciling Israel with the UAE.

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Trump Administration Looks to Gather DNA Data From US Citizens Sponsoring Immigrants - DHS

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration has proposed gathering DNA data from American citizens sponsoring immigrants in the United States, the US Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a notice on Friday.

"DHS proposes that any applicant, petitioner, sponsor, beneficiary, or individual filing or associated with an immigration benefit or request, including United States citizens, must appear for biometrics collection without regard to age unless DHS waives or exempts the biometrics requirement," the notice, published in the Federal Register, revealed,

The federal government a year ago began to collect DNA of migrants in US custody.

Advocacy groups like the American Civil Liberties Union have opposed the collection of DNA over concerns it will make it easier for the government to surveil and target immigrant communities.

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Trump Suggests Palestine, Iran Could Also Agree to Relations With Israel

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump on Friday expressed optimism about the prospect of warming relations between Israel and both Palestine and Iran after Bahrain followed in the steps of the United Arab Emirates in agreeing to normalize ties with the Jewish state.

"You're going to have the Palestinians in a very good position, they want to come, they more than want to come in, because all of their friends are in," Trump told reporters in the Oval Office. "I can see a lot of good things happening with respect to the Palestinians."

He added that he believes something "very positive" could happen with regard to Iran.

Trump's comments came on the heels of his announcement via Twitter that Bahrain and Israel have agreed to establish full diplomatic relations, following a similar deal reached between the Jewish state and the United Arab Emirates.

"Things are happening in the Middle East nobody thought was even possible," Trump said.

"When I took office the Middle East was in a state of absolute chaos."

Trump said there was "tremendous enthusiasm" among countries in the Middle East to join the UAE and Bahrain in signing peace accords, saying they would do so "very quickly."

Both historic agreements will be signed at the White House ceremony next Tuesday.

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UN Special Rapporteur Says US Should Release Information on Risk to Khashoggi's Life

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions Agnes Callamard said in a congressional testimony on Friday that the US government should release information about its knowledge of the risk Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi faced prior to being killed.

"[O]ne area that deserves much more focus is the extent to which the US government knew or should have known that the life of Mr. Khashoggi was at risk and whereas should have done more to protect him," Callamard told the US House Intelligence Committee. "The disclosure of US intelligence including any information related to a warning they may have received and to their duty to warn Mr. Khashoggi, I think is very important and part of the search for justice."

Earlier on Friday, Business Insider reported citing excerpts obtained from US journalist Bob Woodward's upcoming book "Rage" that President Donald Trump had said he protected Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman from Congress over the murder of Khashoggi.

Trump also told Woodward that he did not believe bin Salman ordered Khashoggi to be killed and emphasized the importance of having Saudi Arabia as an ally in the Middle East, especially

with the amount of oil the country produces and the amount of money it has spent on purchasing US arms, according to excerpts from the book.

During the hearing on Friday, US lawmakers asked Callamard whether anyone from the US government had requested to review the evidence she has, to which Callamard replied, "No, nobody did."

Khashoggi went missing in October of 2018 after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul.

Riyadh initially denied any knowledge of the journalist's whereabouts but eventually admitted that Khashoggi was killed and dismembered inside the consulate.

Riyadh has repeatedly denied allegations that any members of the royal family were involved in the incident. A Saudi court has sentenced eight suspects for their role in Khashoggi's death.

After Khashoggi was killed, Trump took executive action to bypass Congress' efforts to cut ties with Saudi Arabia and pushed through an \$8 billion arms sale.

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US-India 2+2 Talks Focused on Fighting Terror, COVID-19 - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Senior US and Indian defense and foreign policy officials during a virtual 2+2 ministerial meeting addressed countering terrorism and COVID-19, among other security issues, the State Department said on Friday.

"The two sides discussed... combating COVID-19, counterterrorism, India's membership on the UN Security Council, support for good governance and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific region and efforts to counteract destabilizing actions in South Asia," the department said in a statement.

US Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for South and Central Asian Affairs Dean Thompson and Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Indo-Pacific Security Affairs David Helvey led the US side, the release said.

Both sides also agreed to further strengthen consultation through United States-India-Australia-Japan Quadrilateral consultations, the State Department said.

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Former Canadian Member of Parliament Charged With Fraud, Breach of Trust - Statement

TORONTO, September 11 (Sputnik) - Former Canadian Member of Parliament Rajvinder Grewal has been charged with fraud and multiple counts of breach of trust, the Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) said in a press release on Friday.

"Today, the RCMP's National Division Sensitive and International Investigations charged Rajvinder Singh Grewal, a former Member of Parliament for the federal riding of Brampton-East,

with four (4) counts of Breach of Trust contrary to Section 122 of the Criminal Code, and one (1) count of Fraud Over \$5,000 contrary to Section 380(1) of the Criminal Code," the statement said.

The RCMP said in the release that Grewal appropriated government funds and used his position as a public office holder to solicit loans for his personal benefit.

Grewal resigned from the Liberal Party of Canada soon after it became public that he was being investigated by RCMP for his multi-million-dollar gambling activities.

Grewal is expected to appear in Ottawa court for his first hearing on October 6.

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US Should Ban Surveillance Equipment Exports to Saudi Arabia Over Khashoggi Killing - UN

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States should consider a moratorium on the export of surveillance equipment to Riyadh over the killing of former Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, a UN human rights expert said in a congressional hearing on Friday.

"[There] should be a moratorium... [on] the export of [US] surveillance equipment to Saudi Arabia," UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial executions, Agnes Callamard, told the US House Intelligence Committee. "It could only be lifted if there's been demonstrated progress in respect of human rights."

Callamard also called for a investigation into any kind of misuse of the surveillance equipment the United States has provided to Saudi Arabia.

Khashoggi, a columnist for the Washington Post, went missing last October after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Riyadh initially denied any knowledge of the journalist's whereabouts but eventually admitted that Khashoggi was killed and dismembered inside the embassy.

Riyadh has repeatedly denied allegations that any members of the royal family were involved in the incident. A Saudi court has sentenced eight suspects for their role in Khashoggi's death, according to the prosecutor's office.

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UN Rapporteur Recommends US Sanction Saudi Crown Prince Over Khashoggi Killing

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - UN Special Rapporteur on extrajudicial, summary or arbitrary executions Agnes Callamard said in a congressional hearing on Friday that she recommends the US government sanction Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman over the killing of journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

"Another possible line of action concerning individual sanctions , some of which have already been taken by the government of the United States," Callamard told the US House Intelligence Committee. "I would recommend that the sanctions focus on the chain of command and be extended to the Crown Prince."

Callamard explained that possible sanctions may include the freezing of some or all of bin Salman's assets until and unless Saudi Arabia takes meaningful steps to address Khashoggi's murder.

Khashoggi, a columnist for the Washington Post, went missing in October 2018 after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Riyadh initially denied any knowledge of Khashoggi's whereabouts, but eventually admitted that he was killed and dismembered inside the embassy. Riyadh has repeatedly denied allegations that any members of the royal family were involved in the incident.

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US, Maldives Sign Defense Agreement to Bolster Security in Indian Ocean

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States and the south Asian country Maldives have committed to a defense partnership to enhance security in the Indian Ocean, the Pentagon said in a press release on Friday.

"Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for South and Southeast Asia Reed Werner and Maldivian Minister of Defense Mariya Didi signed the 'Framework for US Department of Defense-Maldives Ministry of Defence Defense and Security Relationship' in Philadelphia on September 10," the release said.

The Pentagon said the defense partnership will boost cooperation between both countries in the Indian Ocean.

Reed and the Maldivian Defense Minister agreed to soon schedule the first defense and security dialogue between the two countries.

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Israel, Bahrain Agree to Normalize Relations - Joint Statement

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agreed to the establishment of full diplomatic relations between Israel and the Kingdom of Bahrain," according to the statement tweeted by Trump.

Bahrain follows the lead of its neighbor, the United Arab Emirates, which reached the peace deal with Israel last month. Both historical agreements will be signed at the White House ceremony next Tuesday.

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US Immigration Enforcement Used Flights to Send Federal Agents to Protests - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration flew federal agents to the nation's capital to quell protests using charter flights transporting detained immigrants to Virginia, the Washington Post reported on Friday citing current and former US officials. The move was a way for the administration to bypass restrictions on the use of charter flights for employee travel, the report said.

As a result of transporting several detainees to an immigration jail in Virginia, an outbreak of the novel coronavirus disease (COVID-19) occurred at the facility, infecting 300 detainees and killing one, the report said.

The report said US Immigration and Customs Enforcement moved migrant detainees from Arizona and Florida to the facility in Virginia in order to prevent overcrowding.

However, the report said the facilities in both states were not at full capacity.

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US Announces \$2.9Mln in Defense Aid for Aerospace Sensors, Shipbuilding - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The Trump administration is funneling \$2.9 million in aid to boost domestic production of aerospace sensors and shipbuilding, the US Department of Defense said in a press release on Friday.

"[T]he Department of Defense has signed a \$1.9 million agreement with Control Vision to sustain and advance domestic capabilities for aerospace grade optical sensors during the COVID-19 pandemic," Defense Department spokesperson Jessica Maxwell said in the release. The investment in the Arizona-based company will improve future data gathering opportunities on flight tests by enabling improved sensors and software for future missions and ensure that the US government continues to have access to the critical domestic capability, the release explained.

In addition, the Department of Defense entered into a \$1 million agreement with Radio Design Group to sustain critical domestic industrial base capability and capacity for US Navy communication equipment and manufacturing, the release said.

Radio Design Group in Grants Pass, Oregon, provides the US Navy with cutting edge communications equipment is vital for maritime missions and the investment will allow continued production of critical communications equipment and investment in future communications capabilities, the release added.

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UN Chief to Virtually Address Intra-Afghan Talks Participants in Doha - Spokesperson

UNITED NATIONS, September 11 (Sputnik) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres will virtually address the upcoming peace talks in Doha between the government of Afghanistan and the Taliban opposition movement, UN spokesperson Stephane Dujarric said in a press briefing on Friday.

"The Secretary-General will be speaking to the Afghan talks in Doha via pre-recorded video message," Dujarric said.

Negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government are set to kick off in Qatar on September 12. Last week, the sides completed the prisoner exchange, which was a mandatory precondition to starting the intra-Afghan talks, which are expected to pave the way for a peace process and withdrawal of foreign troops after almost two decades of war and insurgency.

According to the spokesman, Guterres views the negotiations as a significant opportunity toward reaching peace in Afghanistan and believes that all Afghan leaders and the international community must do everything possible to achieve this goal.

UN Special Representative for Afghanistan Deborah Lyons will be in Doha during the talks; however, she will not be at the negotiations table, Dujarric added.

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US Should Develop 'Khashoggi Sanctions' to Protect Journalists - UN Special Rapporteur

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States should develop a sanctions program in order to protect journalists like Jamal Khashoggi, UN Special Rapporteur on Extrajudicial Executions Agnes Callamard told the US House Intelligence Committee on Friday.

"I am also recommending that maybe the US government could develop a new program of sanctions called 'The Khashoggi Sanctions' which would take into account the principle of responsibility and focusing on sanctioning senior officials responsible for ordering, inciting or condoning violence against journalists," Callamard said, adding that they could be part of the Magnitsky act.

A spokesperson for the Saudi Public Prosecution's Office said Monday a Saudi court had announced sentences to eight suspects in the killing of Khashoggi. Five of them were given 20-year prison terms, one was sentenced to 10 years in prison, and two to seven years each.

Khashoggi's family considers the sentences in his murder case to be fair, Al Arabiya television reported citing the family's lawyer.

Khashoggi, a columnist for the Washington Post, went missing in October 2018 after entering the Saudi consulate in Istanbul. Riyadh initially denied any knowledge of his whereabouts but eventually admitted that Khashoggi had been killed and dismembered inside the embassy. The Saudi monarchy has denied any role in the journalist's death. In December 2019, a Saudi court sentenced five suspects in the murder to death and jailed another three for a total of 24 years in a trial.

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Virginia Republicans Blame Governor for Attack on Party Headquarters - Statement

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The Republican Party of Virginia (RPV) in a statement on Friday said its headquarters was attacked because the governor failed to respond to earlier incidents

"In prior months, these violent attacks on families and businesses in Virginia's capital city have gone unchecked by Richmond Mayor Levar Stoney and Virginia Governor Ralph Northam, whose neglect enabled last night's attack on the building that has been the home of millions of Virginia Republicans for four decades," the RPV Chairman Rich Anderson said.

RPV headquarters was vandalized on Thursday night, Anderson said. He described the attack as violent, cowardly, and unprovoked.

"While the damage to RPV Headquarters was limited to the glass frontage of the building, it was a clear attempt to induce a sense of terror in Virginia Republicans... I call on Governor Northam, Mayor Stoney, and Democrat members of the General Assembly to condemn these cowardly acts of hate and violence," he said.

Virginia Republicans would restore their headquarters and work to defeat the Democrats who currently controlled the state's General Assembly, the statement added.

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US Charges 2 North Koreans, Malaysian With Sanctions Violations - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Two North Korean nationals and a Malaysian national have been charged with violating United States sanctions, bank fraud and money laundering, the US Department of Justice said in a press release on Friday.

"The Department of Justice announced a criminal complaint charging Ri Jong Chol, Ri Yu Gyong, North Korean nationals, and Gan Chee Lim, a Malaysia national," the release said. "The three were charged with conspiracy to violate North Korean Sanctions Regulations and bank fraud, and conspiracy to launder funds."

The defendants allegedly established and utilized front companies that transmitted US dollar wires through the United States to purchase commodities on behalf of North Korean customers, the Justice Department said.

"The defendants knowingly and willfully circumvented sanctions designed to protect the US financial system from abuse by individuals working on behalf of North Korea," Acting US Attorney Michael Sherwin said in the release. "We will continue to disrupt their actions and hold them accountable."

The Justice Department said in the release that beginning in August 2015, the defendants deceived banks in the United States into processing transactions for North Korean customers. They utilized shipping companies previously linked to the attempted sales of luxury goods to North Korea, and failed to seek the required licenses from the US government, the release added.

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US Will Decide Its Afghanistan Policy Based on Peace Talks' Results - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States will decide on its policy and relations with Afghanistan based on the agreements reached during the upcoming peace negotiations between the Afghan government and the Taliban movement, US Department of State Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad said in a press briefing on Friday.

"The future of Afghanistan is obviously after the Afghans to decide, but we would like to see Afghanistan that is sovereign and that is unified and democratic," Khalilzad said. "And the United States will decide its policies or its relations with Afghanistan, based on the decision and agreement that Afghanistan makes, and the implementation of those agreements."

Negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government are set to kick off in Qatar on September 12. Last week, the two sides completed the prisoner exchange, which was a mandatory precondition to starting the intra-Afghan talks.

The talks are expected to pave the way for a peace process and withdrawal of foreign troops after almost two decades of war and insurgency.

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has arrived at the Qatari capital of Doha to participate in the event.

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US, Qatar to Hold Third Annual Strategic Dialogue in Washington Next Week - State Dept

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States and Qatar will hold their third annual Strategic Dialogue in Washington next week, the State Department announced in a statement on Friday.

"Secretary Pompeo will welcome Qatari Deputy Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al Thani and Finance Minister Ali Sharif Al Emadi to Washington, DC on Monday, September 14 to launch the third annual US-Qatar Strategic Dialogue," the State Department said.

The sides will discuss health security, military cooperation, civil aviation, enhancing civil society, investment, and international development, among other topics, the release added. The parties will also sign an agreement to enhance cultural and educational exchanges between the two countries, the release said.

US Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin and Commerce Secretary Wilbur Ross will also participate, according to the release.

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Trump Honors Flight 93 Passengers on 19th Anniversary of September 11 Terrorist Attacks

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump honored the 33 passengers of Flight 93 who died fighting to prevent their hijacked airplane from crashing in the US Capitol building 19 years ago as the White House concurrently observed a moment of silence to honor the nearly 3,000 victims of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States.

"Today, we pay tribute to their sacrifice and we mourn deeply for the nearly 3,000 precious and beautiful souls," Trump said during a memorial service in Shanksville, Pennsylvania, where the airplane crashed as the passengers stormed the hijackers.

Trump said the passengers' heroism to prevent the airplane from crashing in the US Capitol while both chambers of Congress were in session is an example that would inspire future generations of Americans.

The US President also paid tribute to the more than 7,000 US soldiers who have died since September 11.

"No words can express the summit of their glory or the infinite depth of our gratitude - but we will strive every single day to repay our immeasurable debt and prove worthy of their supreme sacrifice," Trump said.

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Esper, Bangladesh Prime Minister Discuss Situation in Indo-Pacific - Pentagon

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper discussed with Bangladesh Prime Minister and Minister of Defense Sheikh Hasina bilateral relations and the

situation in the Indo-Pacific region, the Department of Defense said in a statement after their telephone call on Friday.

"The two leaders discussed their shared commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific that ensures the sovereignty of all nations, and specific bilateral defense priorities including maritime and regional security, global peacekeeping, and initiatives to modernize Bangladesh's military capabilities," the statement said.

Esper and Hasina expressed desire to continue building closer bilateral defense partnership, the statement added.

The Defense Secretary also commended Bangladesh for its response to the novel coronavirus pandemic and regional issues, according to the statement.

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US to Announce Sanctions Against Belarus Officials in 'Few Days' - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States plans to announce shortly sanctions against Belarusian officials responsible for a crackdown on protests in the country and for election fraud, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun told reporters on Friday.

"In a few short days, we will be able to speak more definitely about the sanctions," Biegun said during a telephone briefing through a Russian-language interpreter. "The reality is that some work - investigative work and some other procedural steps - needs to be done in order to impose effective sanctions. We are already doing this ... in collaboration with the US Treasury and other agencies."

Biegun said the United States plans to impose the sanctions in coordination with the European Union.

"I don't want to speak for them, but I know that they are working in this direction. We are trying to coordinate these actions," he said.

Biegun explained that the initial sanctions will target Belarusian officials responsible for violence and election fraud and will likely involve visa restrictions. Imposing economic sanctions is also possible, but may hurt indiscriminately the Belarusian people.

The Deputy Secretary of State said he would not speculate about the possibility of the United States sanctioning Russia for its support of Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

Biegun noted that the United States maintains sanctions against 16 Belarusian officials that were imposed before the two countries attempted to improve relations earlier this year.

The United States and European Union have criticized Belarus authorities for cracking down on protests that erupted after the opposition disputed the results of the August 9 presidential election.

According to the official results, Lukashenko was reelected for a sixth term having won 80 percent of the vote. The opposition has insisted that its candidate Svetlana Tikhanovskaya won the election.

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Trump Set to Announce Israel-Bahrain Peace Agreement Later on Friday - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump is expected to announce a peace agreement between Israel and Bahrain later on Friday, Israeli media reported.

A source familiar with the matter told the Jerusalem Post that Bahrain Crown Prince Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa would be visiting Washington before the scheduled ceremony for Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) at the White next Tuesday.

The UAE is set to become the third Arab country to fully recognize Israel after Egypt in 1979 and Jordan in 1994. US officials have repeatedly said they are holding negotiations with other Arab countries that can follow the UAE example and reach a peace agreement with Israel. Bahrain and Sudan are considered as the most likely nations in the region to do so.

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US Hopes Afghan Talks Will Produce Roadmap to End War - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) – The delegations of the Afghan government and the Taliban opposition movement will discuss and hopefully agree on a roadmap to end the war in the country, US Department of State Special Representative for Afghanistan Reconciliation Zalmay Khalilzad told reporters on Friday.

"For the first time in 40 years Afghans will sit together ... to discuss and hopefully come to an agreement on a political roadmap to end the protracted war that Afghanistan has had," Khalilzad said during a phone briefing.

Negotiations between the Taliban and the Afghan government are set to kick off in Qatar on September 12. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has arrived to the Qatari capital of Doha to participate in the event.

Khalilzad described upcoming talks as "Afghan-owned and Afghan-led," but said that the United States will be monitoring the process and is prepared to help if asked to.

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US Committed to Hold Perpetrators of September 11 Terrorist Attacks Accountable - Pompeo

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US government remains committed to bring to justice those responsible for the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States,

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in a Twitter statement on the anniversary of the attacks on Friday.

"The 9/11 terrorist attacks will forever be seared into our national memory. Today we honor those we lost," Pompeo said. "As we reflect almost 20 years later the State Department remains steadfast in its commitment to hold terrorists accountable and protect our homeland."

In 2001, members of the Al Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia) seized four passenger airplanes and crashed two in the World Trade Center in New York and one in the Defense Department in Washington, DC. The fourth jet came down in a field in Pennsylvania after being initially directed to fly to Washington, DC. Some 3,000 people from 90 countries lost their lives in the attacks.

Pompeo said that the United States remembers and honors today the nearly 3,000 people who were killed in the attacks, but has made "great strides" to defeat al-Qaeda and other terrorist groups.

"[O]ur efforts to protect our homeland continue today," Pompeo said. "The men and women of the US Department of State are proud to stand side-by-side with partners from all over the world in this effort, and we will not waver in our resolve to hold terrorists accountable as we pursue peace, security and justice."

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US Has Not Suspended Approval Process for Envoy to Belarus Despite Protests - Biegun

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States has not suspended the approval process for the next ambassador to Belarus, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun told reporters.

"We have not suspended that process," Biegun said during a conference call on Friday.

President Donald Trump nominated Deputy Assistant Secretary of State for Western Europe and the European Union Julie Fisher to be the next US ambassador to Belarus.

Biegun confirmed that Fisher continues to go through approval process.

"We believe it is important... to have a representative in Belarus that can give a voice to the policy of the United States and strongly represent the values and interests that we believe are important to address in our relations with Belarus," Biegun said.

A number of US politicians have called on the US Senate to delay Fisher's confirmation due to the unrest in Belarus after the presidential election in August.

Diplomatic relations between the United States and Belarus deteriorated in 2008 when both countries recalled their respective ambassadors. Recently, the two countries have made efforts to improve relations culminating in the visit by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Minsk in February.

In July, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko appointed Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Kravchenko to be the country's ambassador to the United States.

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Pentagon Marks 19th Anniversary of September 11 Terrorist Attacks With Minute of Silence

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US Department of Defense observed a minute of silence on the anniversary of the September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks against the United States during a remembrance ceremony to honor the victims of the attacks.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley hosted the ceremony.

"Much like this morning, on September 11, 2001, Americans were getting ready for what they thought would be just another work day," Esper said. "No one could fathom that on that bright September morning we would experience the worst terrorist attack in our nation's history, a horrific crime carried out by evil fanatics who would brutally kill the innocent in the name of their distorted cause."

Esper characterized the attack as a "vicious assault" directed not just at the American people and institutions, but also against the nation's most sacred ideals: freedom, liberty and the pursuit of happiness.

"Yet, in their attempt to shake the very foundations of our republic, to destroy our way of life, they underestimated our strength, our resolve, our unbreakable spirit," Esper said.

On September 11, 2001, members of the Al Qaeda terror group (banned in Russia) seized four passenger airplanes, crashing two of them in the World Trade Center in New York and another into the Defense Department. The fourth airplane crashed in a field in Pennsylvania after being initially directed toward Washington, DC.

Some 3,000 people from 90 countries lost their lives in the terrorist attacks.

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US Does Not Seek Control of Belarus Opposition - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States respects the sovereignty of Belarus and does not seek to control its opposition, despite ongoing its contacts with them, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun told reporters on Friday.

"We respect the sovereignty of all the Belarusian peoples. We do not want to control the opposition, this is not our goal," Biegun said during a phone briefing through a Russian-language translator.

Since August 9, the Belarusian opposition has been staging mass protests after disputing the results of the election in which incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko was reelected for a sixth term by winning 80 percent of the vote. The opposition insists that its candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, won the election.

"Of course, we maintain some contact, in particular with the leaders of the Coordination council. We hope to support the voice and aspirations of the Belarusian people," Biegun said. "The US will certainly use its international influence to create conditions for free elections in Belarus."

The Coordination council of Belarus was set up by the opposition members who reject the results of the presidential election. State prosecutors launched proceedings against the council, suggesting that it could harm the country's security.

The council says its goals and methods of work comply with the country's constitution. To date, all members of the opposition coordination council have been detained, arrested or are abroad, except for Belarusian writer Svetlana Alexievich, a recipient of the Nobel Prize in Literature.

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US, S.Korea Senior Officials Discuss Special Measures Agreement in Washington- State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun and South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Choi Jung-kun discussed the Special Measures Agreement during their Thursday meeting in Washington, DC, State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said in a readout.

"The Deputy Secretary and Vice Minister discussed the Special Measures Agreement, reaffirmed the enduring strength of the US-ROK [South Korea] alliance, and discussed ways to enhance the alliance to ensure it remains a force for peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific for the decades ahead," Ortagus said on Friday.

Biegun vowed the United States will continue the close cooperation with South Korea regarding peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula, regional security and responding to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

Since 1991, Seoul has shouldered part of the costs for the US troops stationed in South Korea as per the Special Measures Agreement. The most recent agreement expired on December 31, but the two countries are still trying to negotiate a new deal given that US President Donald Trump has on multiple occasions demanded for Seoul to pay a greater share.

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US Arms Control Talks With Russia Unrelated to Position on Belarus, Navalny – State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) – Arms control talks between the United States and Russia will not be derailed as Washington responds to the situation in Belarus or the alleged poisoning of Alexey Navalny, Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun said on Friday.

"Nobody in the United States linking our positions on [arms control] with brutal violence in Belarus, nor the tragic poisoning of Alexey Navalny," Biegun said during conference call with reporters.

Biegun expressed confidence that negotiations between Russia and the US on the New START Treaty would successfully continue, despite any recent developments.

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US to Announce Sanctions Against Belarus Officials in 'Few Days' - State Department

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States plans shortly to announce sanctions against Belarusian officials responsible for a violent crackdown on protests in the country and election fraud, US Deputy Secretary of State Stephen Biegun told reporters on Friday.

"In a few short days, we will be able to speak more definitely about the sanctions," Biegun said during a phone briefing through a Russian-language interpreter.

The United States plans sanctions in coordination with the European Union, he added.

Biegun said that initial sanctions will target officials and will likely involve visa restrictions.

Economic measures are also possible, though, as he admitted, they can hurt indiscriminately the Belarusian people.

Biegun refused to speculate on the possibility of sanctioning Russia for its support for Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko.

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US Strategic Bombers Conduct Mission Over East Siberian Sea - US European Command

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) – A group of three US strategic bombers departed from the state of Texas to conduct a mission over the East Siberia Sea before a planned deployment to Europe, United States European Command said in a statement on Friday.

"Texas-based US Air Force Reserve B-1 Lancer bomber aircraft flew a US European Command (USEUCOM) planned and led Bomber Task Force (BTF) mission from Texas into the easternmost section of the USEUCOM area of responsibility," the statement read. "Immediately following the mission over international airspace over the East Siberian Sea, aircraft and crews then deployed to Eielson Air Force Base near Fairbanks, Alaska, landing today, to prepare for another long-scheduled deployment to Europe."

The continuous 14-hour, 4,300 nautical mile mission completes the deployment of six B-52 bombers to Fairford air base in England, USEUCOM added.

It also demonstrated the US ability to continually execute flying missions and sustain readiness in support of its allies and partners, regardless of any external challenge, including the ongoing COVID-19 global pandemic, the statement said.

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RPT: PREVIEW - COVID-19 Pandemic Killed 9/11 Rescuers This Year, Remembered as Bells Toll

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The continuing COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit New York City harder in terms of cases and deaths than any other major US city, has led to a revision in the now traditional memorial events for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.
PANDEMIC ATTACKS

There is a special heartbreak this year. As the Long Island, New York-based newspaper Newsday pointed out in a report, many of the the firefighters, police officers, Emergency Medical Service and construction workers who worked for weeks at Ground Zero, the site of the destroyed World Trade Towers, have died this year,

After nearly two decades of fighting weakened immune systems and ongoing conditions caused by inhaling so much asbestos and other toxins from the ruins of the Twin Towers, they were finally finished off by the COVID-19 virus which ravaged New York City and State this year with a deadly toll unequaled anywhere else in the United States.

Newsday reported that more than 125,000 people, including 79,000 first responders, have enrolled in the World Trade Center Health Program and at least 18,000 have been diagnosed with a 9/11-related cancer, according to official government figures.

More than 2,000 first responders, office workers and residents of lower Manhattan have already died from 9/11-related illnesses and officials anticipate that figure will eventually be greater than the nearly 3,000 death toll of 9/11 itself.

Once again, thousands of people will gather on Friday morning the site of the attacks where the 1,776 foot high Freedom Tower now stands, including the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in the financial district of Lower Manhattan.

DIFFERENT MEMORIAL

For each of the past 18 years, thousands have gathered at the World Trade Center site to honor the nearly 3,000 souls who perished in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks but this year's memorial will be starkly different.

Starting at 8.30 a.m. EST (12:30 p.m. GMT), instead of the traditional live reading of the names of all the victims, the gathering will play a recorded reading of their names.

"We understand the disappointment that some within the 9/11 community have expressed with this year's change," the museum said. "Protecting the health and safety of everyone at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum is a great responsibility."

The Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to first responders and named after a New York City firefighter who lost his life on 9/11, has organized a parallel live name-reading to be held close by at the corner of Liberty and Church streets.

US Vice President Mike Pence is expected to participate in the Siller Foundation ceremony, which is planned to be enacted by 140 masked, socially-distanced participants. It is also due to start at 8.30 a.m. EST.

Families of the almost 3,000 victims of the 9/11 attacks by al-Qaeda terrorist group (outlawed in Russia) are expected to attend the main service but they have been requested to wear face masks and practice social distancing to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

BELLS TOLL

Six times during Friday morning, bells across New York City will toll to commemorate different key events of Tuesday, September 11, 2001.

First, at 8:46 a.m. EST, the moment when the hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 was flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Then, at 9:02 am, when the second hijacked airliner United Airlines Flight 175 struck hit the WTC's South Tower. And then, at 9:37 am, when the third hijacked airliner American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon in Northern Virginia.

The fourth time that the bells will toll, will be at 9:59 am when the South Tower collapsed; then at 10:02 am, when hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania; and finally at 10:29 am when the WTC North Tower collapsed.

After sunset on Friday, twin beams of light created by flood lights near the World Trade Center site will be shone into the sky as a tribute.

In Virginia, US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army General Mark Milley will lead a ceremony on Friday at the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial in honor of the 184 people killed in the attack on the Pentagon. This ceremony will not be public but will be podcast in a livestream on [defense.gov](https://www.defense.gov).

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New York Times Reporter Says Trump Campaign Escorted Her Out of Rally After Tweeting Pics

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - New York Times reporter Kathy Gray, after posting several photos of the crowd outside the hangar in front of Air Force One, said she was escorted out of President Donald Trump's campaign rally in Michigan.

"First for me: Trump campaign tracked me down from pics i tweeted and escorted me out," Gray said via Twitter on Thursday.

The reasons for Gray being kicked out of the rally are unclear, but the images she posted on Twitter were similar to the images shown by media outlets broadcasting Trump's campaign rally in Freeland, Michigan.

Reporters attending campaign rallies usually reserve their spots prior to the date of the rally.

Hours before the event, reporters will go through a check-in process with the campaign's media liaison and the US Secret Service inspects each reporter's equipment before being allowed to enter the area where the US president will be present.

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UPDATE 2 - Key 'Swing' State of Wisconsin's Supreme Court Halts Absentee Ballot Distribution - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The Supreme Court of the state of Wisconsin ordered the mailing of absentee ballots for the US presidential election to be suspended pending a decision on whether to allow the participation of the Green Party candidate Howie Hawkins, a court filing revealed.

Trump upset Hillary Clinton in Wisconsin in 2016 by less than one percent of votes cast. Moreover, Wisconsin had a 1.8% absentee ballot rejection rate in this year's Democratic Primary, representing about 23,000 votes – about the same number that Trump won the state by in 2016.

Hawkins has disputed in court the Wisconsin Elections Commission's decision not to list him on the ballot because of allegations that his running mate Angela Walker listed an incorrect address on thousands of nominating papers for signature.

According to the Wisconsin State Journal, the decision came down along partisan lines.

"The court, in a 4-3 decision with all liberal-backed justices dissenting, said clerks should hold off on sending out any absentee ballots until it issues a further order in the case," the report said on Thursday.

The court also asked the Wisconsin Elections Commission to report whether any ballots have been mailed out to voters. As of Thursday, the Wisconsin Elections Commission logged nearly a million of absentee ballot requests on file, according to the report.

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UPDATE - Key 'Swing' State of Wisconsin's Supreme Court Halts Absentee Ballot Distribution - Filing

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US Charges California Man for Attempting to Firebomb Republican Club - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - A federal court has charged a US man with allegedly attempting to firebomb a Republican club in the state of California, the Justice Department said in a press release.

"A Palm Desert man was named today in a federal criminal complaint that charges him with attempted arson in the May 31 firebombing of the East Valley Republican Women Federated (EVRWF) office in La Quinta," the release said on Thursday.

The suspect, Carlos Espriu, 23, allegedly tried to burn the building down using Molotov cocktails on May 31, but it only caused limited damage, the release said.

Three days before the incident, according to the Justice Department, Espriu tweeted: "I wanna go burn shit n get hit with tear gas."

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Russia Received No Answers From OPCW on Staged Chlorine Attack in Syria's Duma - Envoy

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Russia has not received any answers from the Organization for the Prevention of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) on the alleged staged chlorine attack incident in Duma, Syria, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said.

"We dedicated a special Arria-Formula meeting to this incident this January with extensive evidence of the staged nature of the episode, which was marked by deliberate flaws in ballistic, toxicology and chemical analyses," Nebenzia said on Thursday. "We still didn't revive answers from these multiple examples of malpractices from the OPCW Technical Secretariat."

In January, members of the UN Security Council held an informal meeting at the request of the Russian mission to assess the situation regarding the fact finding mission's Final Report on the alleged chlorine incident in Duma.

In November, WikiLeaks published an email from a member of the OPCW mission to Syria to his superiors in which he voiced gravest concerns about the redacted version of the fact finding mission's report he had co-authored.

The member said the report, which is understood to have been edited by the Technical Secretariat, misrepresented facts, omitted certain details and introduced "unintended bias" thereby morphing into something very different than the original draft.

Nebezia said the incident was also marked by manipulation of the conclusions by the ethical team and by harassment of those experts that came to alternative conclusions.

In July 2019, Russia's envoy to the OPCW, Alexander Shulgin charged that the organization's mission head probing claims of a chemical attack in Duma had never traveled to this city.

Reports about an alleged chemical attack in Duma emerged on April 7, 2018. The European Union and the United States promptly accused the Syrian government while Damascus denied any involvement. Syria and Russia said that the attack was staged by local militants and the White Helmets group.

A week later, without waiting for the results of an international investigation, the United States, the United Kingdom and France hit what they called Syria's chemical weapons facilities with more than 100 missiles in response to the alleged attack.

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US Will Not Extend September 15 Deadline for China's ByteDance to Sell TikTok - Trump

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - There will be no extension of the September 15 deadline imposed by the US government for the Chinese company ByteDance to sell its video sharing application TikTok or see it closed up in the United States, President Donald Trump told reporters.

"There will be no extension of the TikTok dealdine," Trump said on the runway at Joint Base Andrews on Thursday before flying to a campaign rally in the state of Michigan. "We will either close up TikTok in this country for security reasons or it will be sold. ... We will see what happens."

In August, Trump ordered the Beijing-based ByteDance to sell its US business or the popular video application would be banned.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has claimed that TikTok and other applications like WeChat are feeding data directly to China's national security apparatus.

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Wisconsin Supreme Court Halts Absentee Ballot Distribution for US Election - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The Supreme Court of the state of Wisconsin ordered the mailing of absentee ballots for the US presidential election to be suspended pending a decision on whether to allow the participation of the Green Party candidate Howie Hawkins, the Wisconsin State Journal reported.

Hawkins has disputed in court the Wisconsin Elections Commission's decision not to list him on the ballot because of allegations that his running mate Angela Walker listed an incorrect address on thousands of nominating papers for signature.

"The court, in a 4-3 decision with all liberal-backed justices dissenting, said clerks should hold off on sending out any absentee ballots until it issues a further order in the case," the report said on Thursday.

The court also asked the Wisconsin Elections Commission to report whether any ballots have been mailed out to voters.

As of Thursday, the Wisconsin Elections Commission logged nearly a million of absentee ballot requests on file, according to the report.

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Officials in Mueller Probe Erased Gov't Phones Before Turning Them In - Justice Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - At least 30 phones used by investigators on Special Counsel Robert Mueller's team appear to have been wiped clean by users before the devices were either returned to the Justice Department or reassigned to new users, according to documents released by the Justice Department.

The data erasures were disclosed in a 87-page file released on Thursday – a file that appeared to consist of a compilation of responses to multiple Freedom of Information Act requests that begin with Justice Department memos regarding texts between former FBI employees Peter Strzok and Lisa Page.

Both were dismissed by Mueller in the summer of 2016 over an exchange of multiple text messages disparaging then-candidate and future President Donald Trump.

The 87-page file includes a four-page inventory spreadsheet containing more than 100 entries, each applying to a single phone that was either transferred to a new user or returned to the Justice Department.

In many, if not most cases, data appeared to have been erased by the users themselves. Some users claimed they entered the wrong password too many times. Another common explanation was that the user forgot the passcode. One user even claimed the phone had "wiped itself without intervention from him."

It could not be determined from the documents if anything nefarious had taken place, although the erasures could present an obstacle for Senate investigators, who are attempting to determine why and how the Mueller probe of alleged collusion between Trump and Russia began.

Mueller's final report completed in the spring of 2019, showed no collusion had taken place between Russia and the Trump campaign, or with aides during the subsequent transition, giving heft to repeated claims by Trump that he had been victimized in a witch hunt by FBI and congressional Democrats, who were determined to overturn results of the 2016 presidential election.

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Russia Unable to Probe Navalny Case Due to Germany Refusing to Provide Facts - Nebenzia

UNITED NATIONS, September 11 (Sputnik) - Germany still has not provided any evidence to confirm that Russian opposition figure Alexey Navalny had been poisoned with a Novichok-type nerve agent that would allow starting an investigation in the case, Russian Ambassador to the United Nations Vassily Nebenzia said during a UN Security Council meeting.

"Any investigation should be preceded by evidence and by facts. Our law enforcement authorities do not have grounds to open an investigation. Our doctors did not find any chemical weapon substances in his [Navalny's] analysis," Nebenzia said on Thursday. "We received no evidence from Germany that would allow us to reach the conclusion that it was a crime by attempted poisoning and thus start an investigation."

Nebenzia referred to a statement by the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs that if Germany declines to provide evidence to back its allegations of poisoning, Moscow would regard it as a refusal to establish the truth and as a hostile provocation undermining the two countries' bilateral relations.

Earlier during the UN Security Council meeting, the United States, Estonia, France and Germany had called for a probe into the alleged use of a Novichok nerve agent against Navalny.

Navalny is currently recuperating at the Berlin-based Charite clinic, where he was transported after suffering an acute medical condition during a flight in Russia on August 20. Last week, the German government said that a German military laboratory found traces of a nerve agent from the Novichok group in his system. Moscow responded by pointing to a lack of evidence in Berlin's claims and noting that Russian doctors had found no toxic substances in Navalny's organism.

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US Court Stops Trump Effort to Exclude Illegal Migrants From Census Apportionment - Filing

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US District Court for the Southern District of New York has blocked the Trump administration's effort to exclude undocumented immigrants from the process that determines congressional representation in each US state based on population, court documents revealed.

"By directing the Secretary to provide two sets of numbers, one derived from the decennial census and one not, and announcing that it is the policy of the United States to use the latter in connection with apportionment, the Presidential Memorandum deviates from, and thus violates, the statutory scheme," a court filing said on Thursday.

The court document added that the presidential memorandum also violates the statute governing the apportionment because and "so long as they reside in the United States, illegal aliens qualify as 'persons in' a 'State' as Congress used those words."

Trump has worried that counting undocumented immigrants in the apportionment process could result in the allocation of two or three more congressional seats in certain US states.

Last July, Trump issued an executive order that instructed the Commerce Department to gather data on the number of US citizens, non-citizens and undocumented immigrants in the United States over concerns that illegal immigrants were being counted for the apportionment for congressional representation.

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Portland Mayor Bans Use of Tear Gas for Crowd Control

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - Portland Mayor Ted Wheeler, who also serves as city police chief, said he has banned law enforcement from using tear gas against protesters.

"Effective immediately... I am directing the Portland police bureau to end the use of cs gas for crowd control," Wheeler said in a video clip on Thursday.

Portland, a city in the state of Oregon in the US northwest, has been rocked by protests and riots over police violence since late May. The Portland police have often resorted to using tear gas. The Justice Department has arrested and charged numerous Portlanders for allegedly assaulting police.

Clashes between law enforcement officers and groups of activists have become a nightly feature in Portland since the May 25 death of unarmed suspect George Floyd in police custody, which prompted nationwide protests against police brutality and racism. However, many of the protests turned into riots complete with violence against police and civilians alike as well as with acts of vandalism, arson and looting.

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Acting DHS Chief Wolf's Nomination Sent to US Senate for Consideration - White House

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The White House said in a statement said it has sent to the US Senate Acting Homeland Security Secretary Chad Wolf's nomination to lead the Department of Homeland Security (DHS).

"Nominations to the Senate: Chad F. Wolf, of Virginia, to be Secretary of Homeland Security, vice Kirstejen Nielsen, resigned," the statement said on Thursday.

Wolf has won support from many Republicans in Congress and the ire of many Democrats by supporting President Donald Trump's initiative to build a wall on the US border with Mexico and an accompanying crackdown on illegal border crossers.

More recently, Wolf responded to Trump's call for a crackdown on violent anti-police protests in Portland, Oregon, by deploying federal law enforcement officers to protect federally owned facilities.

In August, the US Government Accountability Office said in a report that it found that Wolf and acting Deputy Secretary Ken Cuccinelli are not eligible to serve in their current roles because their appointments were invalid.

The DHS Office of General Council rebuked the watchdog report and said both officials were lawfully serving in their roles.

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OPCW Plans 2 Inspections at Syria's Barzah, Jamrayah Facilities This Year - UN Official

UNITED NATIONS, September 11 (Sputnik) - The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) Technical Secretariat intends to conduct two rounds of inspections at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities in Syria this year, United Nations High Representative for Disarmament Affairs Izumi Nakamitsu said at a UN Security Council meeting.

"I have been advised that the OPCW Technical Secretariat still plans to conduct two rounds of inspections of the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities of the Syrian Scientific Studies and Research Centre (SSRC) in 2020," Nakamitsu said on Thursday.

Nakamitsu noted that the inspections' undertaking would be dependent on the evolution of the novel coronavirus pandemic and its impact on the OPCW activities in Syria.

In 2017, the OPCW inspectors confirmed that there were no activities related to chemical weapons at the Barzah and Jamrayah facilities.

Syria has repeatedly denied using chemical weapons after having them destroyed as part of a Russia-brokered agreement with OPCW in 2013. The government have accused militants of staging chemical attacks, which have then been used by Western powers to justify military activities on Syrian territory.

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Canada's Communist Party Calls on Ottawa, Washington to Stop Interfering in Belarus

TORONTO, September 11 (Sputnik) - The Community Party of Canada in a statement denounced efforts to interfere in Belarus' internal affairs and called on the federal government and the United States to respect the country's sovereignty.

"The Communist Party of Canada denounces the interference in the internal affairs of Belarus, by the United States, European Union and NATO countries," the statement said on Thursday.

"The Party calls on the Canadian government to immediately stop its involvement in the

campaign to destabilize the country, and to normalize relations with the elected government of Alexander Lukashenko."

The Communist Party urged Canadian trade unions and progressive organizations to oppose the US- and EU-led campaign, which Canada is involved in, to destabilize the Eastern European nation.

Canada's communist party also noted that the election was observed by independent international monitors, including from the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), who said the election went ahead "in accordance with the law."

On August 9, the Belarusian opposition organized protests after disputing the results of the presidential election in which incumbent President Alexander Lukashenko was reelected for a sixth term by winning 80 percent of the vote. The opposition insists that its candidate, Svetlana Tikhanovskaya, won the election.

Canadian Foreign Minister Francois-Philippe Champagne has said that Canada does not recognize the results of the presidential elections in Belarus and has pledged the country's full support for Tikhanovskaya.

Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko has repeatedly accused Western nations of direct interference in the situation in the country and Belarusian Foreign Minister Vladimir Makei has informed his counter about "specific facts" of external interference in the affairs of Minsk, Moscow has also voiced its concern over the signs of foreign interference in the internal affairs of Belarus. Spokesperson Dmitry Peskov said last week that the Kremlin will not give any assessments to events in Belarus, considering it equivalent to interference in another country's sovereign affairs.

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Trump Says He 'Saved' Saudi Crown Prince From Congress Over Khashoggi's Murder - Reports

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - US President Donald Trump told some officials he protected Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman from Congress over the October 2018 murder of Washington Post columnist Jamal Khashoggi, Business Insider reported citing excerpts obtained from prominent US journalist Bob Woodward's upcoming book "Rage."

"I saved his ass," Trump said as quoted by Business Insider on Thursday. "I was able to get Congress to leave him alone. I was able to get them to stop."

Trump also told Woodward that he didn't believe the Crown Prince ordered Khashoggi's murder, emphasizing the importance of having Saudi Arabia as an ally in the Middle East, especially with the amount of oil the country produces and the amount of money the country has spent on US arms, according excerpts from the book.

After the Khashoggi murder, Trump took executive action to bypass Congress' efforts to cut ties with Riyadh and pushed through an \$8 billion arms sale to Saudi Arabia.

Moreover, on Wednesday, US media reported that Trump told Woodward he has a secret nuclear weapon that has not been seen by the public or rival leaders such as Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping.

"I have built a nuclear — a weapons system that nobody's ever had in this country before," Trump told Woodward. "We have stuff that you haven't even seen or heard about. We have stuff that Putin and Xi have never heard about before. There's nobody — what we have is incredible."

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Trump Discusses 'Important' Issues With Hungary Prime Minister Orban - White House

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - President Donald Trump discussed "important" bilateral and regional issues with Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban in a phone conversation, White House Press Deputy Secretary Judd Deere said in a statement.

"Today, President Donald Trump spoke with Prime Minister Viktor Orban of Hungary," Deere said in a Twitter message on Thursday. "The President and the Prime Minister... discussed important bilateral and regional issues."

Deere said Trump also expressed his gratitude to the Hungarian leader for using his influence to help bring about the Abraham Accords between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and the meeting at the White House last week between Serbian President Aleksander Vucic and Kosovo Prime Minister Avdullah Hoti.

In July, Boeing announced that it was expanding to Hungary the training of crews to operate NATO's C-17 cargo aircraft with the deployment of an aircraft under US military sales contract.

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PREVIEW - COVID-19 Pandemic Killed 9/11 Rescuers This Year, Remembered as Bells Toll

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The continuing COVID-19 pandemic, which has hit New York City harder in terms of cases and deaths than any other major US city, has led to a revision in the now traditional memorial events for the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001.

PANDEMIC ATTACKS

There is a special heartbreak this year. As the Long Island, New York-based newspaper Newsday pointed out in a report, many of the the firefighters, police officers, Emergency Medical Service and construction workers who worked for weeks at Ground Zero, the site of the destroyed World Trade Towers, have died this year,

After nearly two decades of fighting weakened immune systems and ongoing conditions caused by inhaling so much asbestos and other toxins from the ruins of the Twin Towers, they were

finally finished off by the COVID-19 virus which ravaged New York City and State this year with a deadly toll unequaled anywhere else in the United States.

Newsday reported that more than 125,000 people, including 79,000 first responders, have enrolled in the World Trade Center Health Program and at least 18,000 have been diagnosed with a 9/11-related cancer, according to official government figures.

More than 2,000 first responders, office workers and residents of lower Manhattan have already died from 9/11-related illnesses and officials anticipate that figure will eventually be greater than the nearly 3,000 death toll of 9/11 itself.

Once again, thousands of people will gather on Friday morning the site of the attacks where the 1,776 foot high Freedom Tower now stands, including the National September 11 Memorial and Museum in the financial district of Lower Manhattan.

DIFFERENT MEMORIAL

For each of the past 18 years, thousands have gathered at the World Trade Center site to honor the nearly 3,000 souls who perished in the Sept. 11, 2001 terrorist attacks but this year's memorial will be starkly different.

Starting at 8.30 a.m. EST (12:30 p.m. GMT), instead of the traditional live reading of the names of all the victims, the gathering will play a recorded reading of their names.

"We understand the disappointment that some within the 9/11 community have expressed with this year's change," the museum said. "Protecting the health and safety of everyone at the 9/11 Memorial & Museum is a great responsibility."

The Stephen Siller Tunnel to Towers Foundation, a nonprofit dedicated to first responders and named after a New York City firefighter who lost his life on 9/11, has organized a parallel live name-reading to be held close by at the corner of Liberty and Church streets.

US Vice President Mike Pence is expected to participate in the Siller Foundation ceremony, which is planned to be enacted by 140 masked, socially-distanced participants. It is also due to start at 8.30 a.m. EST.

Families of the almost 3,000 victims of the 9/11 attacks by al-Qaeda terrorist group (outlawed in Russia) are expected to attend the main service but they have been requested to wear face masks and practice social distancing to prevent the spread of the COVID-19 virus.

BELLS TOLL

Six times during Friday morning, bells across New York City will toll to commemorate different key events of Tuesday, September 11, 2001.

First, at 8:46 a.m. EST, the moment when the hijacked American Airlines Flight 11 was flown into the North Tower of the World Trade Center. Then, at 9:02 am, when the second hijacked airliner United Airlines Flight 175 struck hit the WTC's South Tower. And then, at 9:37 am, when the third hijacked airliner American Airlines Flight 77 crashed into the Pentagon in Northern Virginia.

The fourth time that the bells will toll, will be at 9:59 am when the South Tower collapsed; then at 10:02 am, when hijacked United Airlines Flight 93 crashed in Shanksville, Pennsylvania; and finally at 10:29 am when the WTC North Tower collapsed.

After sunset on Friday, twin beams of light created by flood lights near the World Trade Center site will be shone into the sky as a tribute.

In Virginia, US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army General Mark Milley will lead a ceremony on Friday at the National 9/11 Pentagon Memorial in

honor of the 184 people killed in the attack on the Pentagon. This ceremony will not be public but will be podcast in a livestream on [defense.gov](https://www.defense.gov).

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US Arrests Iranian-Canadian National at Helm of International Human Smuggling Ring - DHS

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The US authorities in conjunction with their Brazilian counterparts have arrested the alleged Iranian-Canadian leader of an international smuggling ring, the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) said in a statement.

US law enforcement alleges that Reza Sahami was involved in smuggling individuals, primarily from Iran, into countries in the Americas for more than ten years.

"The alleged leader of a major human smuggling organization that had smuggled individuals from the Middle East (primarily Iran) into South America, the United States, Canada and Europe was arrested Friday," the statement said.

The suspect was arrested as he led a group of seven Iranian nationals - all in possession of fraudulent or altered passports from Israel, Denmark and Canada - through the municipality of Assis Brasil in the western part of the country, the statement added.

The investigation and operation involved US Immigration and Custom Enforcements' Homeland Security Investigations unit, Brazil Federal Police and Interpol National Central Bureau in Brazil, according to the statement.

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US Coordinating With Athens, EU to Assess Needs After Refugee Camp Fire - State Dept.

WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik) - The United States is coordinating with Athens and the European Union to assess needs following the devastating fire at the largest migrant camp on the island of Lesbos, State Department spokesperson Morgan Ortagus said in statement.

"We are deeply saddened to hear of the fires that consumed the Moria Reception and Identification Center on the Greek island of Lesbos, which has resulted in the further displacement of thousands of refugees and asylum seekers," Ortagus said on Thursday. "The United States is coordinating with the Government of Greece, the European Union, and our humanitarian partners to assess needs, and we continue to provide humanitarian assistance, including critical aid such as food, water, shelter, and protection to vulnerable refugees and migrants in Greece."

A huge blaze destroyed the overcrowded Moria facility in the early hours of Wednesday, leaving nearly 13,000 migrants without shelter. According to Greek media, the fire could have been caused by arson. The fire broke out after reports emerged that 35 residents of the camp had been diagnosed with COVID-19.

Following the blaze, the EU and the UNHCR have already announced their readiness to provide Greece with necessary support on the ground and help the country's government in dealing with the aftermath of the fire. In addition, German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas said that EU nations should help Greece, including by relocating refugees across the bloc.

Greece has long been struggling to handle the inflow of migrants and refugees from Turkey, resulting in overcrowded camps that are conducive to fire hazards. The EU remains split over sharing burden of countries of first arrival.

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SPUTNIK TOP STORIES OF THE DAY
WASHINGTON, September 11 (Sputnik)

NEW US SANCTIONS AGAINST RUSSIA

- * The United States has imposed new sanctions on four Russia-linked individuals, including Ukrainian parliament member Andrii Derkach, for allegedly interfering in the US election, the Treasury Department said in a press release on Thursday.
- * The United States has charged Russian national Artem Mikhaylovich Lifshits for alleged wire fraud conspiracy aimed at furthering foreign influence operations in the United States, the Justice Department said.

MASSIVE FIRE IN BEIRUT

- * A huge fire has erupted in the port of Beirut a month after the massive, deadly explosion at the same location that killed at least 190 people, a Sputnik corresponded reported from the scene on Thursday.
- * No one was killed or gravely injured as a result of the fire that erupted in the Lebanese port of Beirut, Lebanese Red Cross Secretary-General George Kettaneh said.
- * The fire in the port of Beirut could have occurred due to arson, Lebanese President Michel Aoun said at a meeting of the Supreme Security Council.

INTRA-AFGHAN TALKS

- * Intra-Afghan talks in the Qatari capital of Doha will begin on September 12, the Qatari Foreign Ministry said in a statement on Thursday.
- * The Afghan government delegation is scheduled to live for Doha on Friday to have peace talks with the Taliban radical movement, a source told Sputnik.
- * The Taliban confirmed that the intra-Afghan peace talks will begin on September 12.
- * The United States welcomes the announcement that the Afghanistan peace talks will begin this weekend, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said.

BELARUS DEVELOPMENTS

* Belarusian Defense Ministry International Military Cooperation Department head Oleg Voinov held talks with US Charge d'Affaires Jeffrey Giauque and stressed the inadmissibility of foreign interference in Belarus, the Defense Ministry said on Thursday.

* The European Union will impose sanctions against 40-50 Belarusian officials in connection with the post-election protests, Polish Deputy Foreign Minister Piotr Wawrzyk said.

EU-UK TALKS

* The Brexit Withdrawal agreement cannot be unilaterally changed or disregarded, the European Commission said Thursday after an extraordinary meeting of the EU-UK Joint Committee.

* Serious differences remain in the EU-UK talks on issue of future relations, EU chief Brexit negotiator Michel Barnier said in a statement.

* UK chief Brexit negotiator David Frost acknowledged a number of challenges and significant divergences in talks with the European Union.

CORONAVIRUS VACCINE

* The Russian Direct Investment Fund, one of the entities behind the Russian coronavirus vaccine Sputnik V, plans to supply up to 100 million doses to various countries in South America, the company's CEO Kirill Dmitriev said on Thursday.

* Russian Gamaleya research institute refutes the data - and claims - regarding the Russian vaccine that were published in the Lancet journal as untrustworthy, the deputy head for scientific research at the institute Denis Logunov told Sputnik.